

Power of musical sound and its impact on the psyche: an Indic perspective

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Abstract

It is a general feeling of a keen listener of any music genre that music changes one emotionally. It is a feeling that music has a force that pushes off one's emotions. How does an emotional shift occur if there is no abstract force? There are discussions within scholarly domains regarding the power of music. However, this aspect is not interpreted from a traditional Indian perspective. This paper addresses the power of music as discussed in Indian philosophical domains and makes psychological comments. This article is aimed to understand the power of music within the Indian traditional system and to find its impact on the psyche with the help of conventional Indian theories in Sanskrit literature. It is found that there are two powers of musical sound which are identified by Ācārya Abhinavagupta (940-1015 AD.): *Ānanda-śakti* (power of bliss) and *Mādhurya-śakti* (power of sweetness). In addition, the power of bliss is connected to the *rasa* theory of Indian aesthetics, which directly correlates with humane psychology. It is discussed in the paper that the relish of *rasa* itself demonstrates subduing of *rajas* and *tamas* and *sattva* predominates the psyche. In other words, the mind achieves its homeostasis according to Ayurvedic principles. In addition, this paper also tried to synthesize the modern aspect of the power of music, which is discussed from therapeutic contexts with traditional Indian theories.

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Introduction

As a rational being, human commonly perceives that music has a charming effect whether it is being listened to or rendered. This perception continues from antiquity. The music makes one feels delighted. They feel that an abstract *vis-a-tergo* is in action that forces their inner soul to reach a state of happiness. However, they cannot explain 'how'. If one asks, they will say in negative. If otherwise, they will say it is according to their needed emotion or mood. However, this could not answer the question: how does music make one delight? Hence, there is a need for a scholarly interpretation.

This discussion could have stopped by explaining the power of music philosophically and psychologically. However, for the sake of synthesis with the modern trend of the power of music research, this article added a further explanation regarding the medico-psychological benefits from an Indic aspect.

Modern scholars widely discuss the power of music in the context of music therapy. They mentioned that music that is enjoyable and provides satisfaction or pleasure could be used in a therapeutic context, and individuals benefit from receptively or actively engaging with music throughout their lifespan (Hallam, 2010). Along with music application, self-belief and future aspiration help to get the advantage of therapy (Gangopadhyay & Prasad, 2022b; Hallam, 2010).

The results of empirical studies push them to observe and elaborate on the power of music in their literary works (Bufalini & George, 2020; Hallam, 2010; Sacks, 2006). However, this is the way that helps an individual to understand the power of any existent entity. This aspect is elaborated in a section (*Definition of Power*) of this present article. Notably, modern scholars did not go into any philosophical and psychological theory to explain the power of music.

This paper tries to address the previous aspects of the power of music from an Indic perspective with the help of the theories of traditional philosophers. Needless to say that there is no Indian philosophy that is detached from psychology. In the traditional knowledge system of India, philosophy, psychology, and metaphysics go together.

Rather than Abhinavagupta (940-1015 AD.), no other philosopher dealt with the power of music as much as the present authors surveyed. With the theory of Abhinavagupta, the celebrated *rasa* theory (RT), ascribed to Bharata (ca. 300 BC. – 300 AD.), helped explain the link between music and enjoyment. Finally, philosophical and psychological aspects of aesthetics and Ayurveda helped to explain the impact of music, which is naturally embedded with its powers, on the humane psyche in a therapeutic context. This last aspect tried to synthesize this research work with the modern element of discussion regarding the power of music.

We tried to reduce the use of Sanskrit terms and placed only the English translations or cruxes of the original Sanskrit texts in the body text. We believe that this way, the present article would be more comprehensive for those readers who have not or have less interaction with this language. However, at the end of this article, two glossaries are placed where Sanskrit terms for used English terms are mentioned, and original passages or verses are cited. A numbering policy, [x], is used to identify the Sanskrit passages or verses in the body text.

Abhinavagupta's theory

In his celebrated work, *Tantrāloka* (TA), Abhinavagupta suggests two powers of music. When Abhinavagupta states about music, it has to be understood that the form is pure and untouched by any percussive and linguistic sound.

Definition of musical sound

Abhinavagupta states the power of sweetness (PS) in TA with more than one verse [i]. According to him, the PS of the music comes from its non-separateness. What is non-separateness, and how is it applicable to music? To understand this, the philosophical definition of musical sound, according to Abhinavagupta, needs to be discussed.

According to Abhinavagupta, music is the most subtle sound among the gross sounds, whereas linguistic sound is the grossest sound. The sound of percussions (animal and related sounds, too) is in an intermediary stage. Abhinavagupta takes two extrema of perceived sounds: (i) linguistic sounds, which are constructed of various sounded letters and ultimately form sentences from which humane verbal perception happens; (ii) musical sounds which consist of a total absence of letters and sounds stand with their internal consonances. As Abhinavagupta detects, these extreme conditions consist of manifested and unmanifested sounds. The separateness of letters makes the linguistic sound as manifested.

On the other hand, the absence of that separateness with letters makes the musical sound unmanifested. It further means that musical notes are not perceived separately but collectively in musical rendition. Hence, manifestation has a contextual meaning here.

In the case of the intermediary stage of sound, this is relatively manifested and unmanifested regarding those two extrema. The intermediary sound is manifested in relative effect with the musical sound because notes are easily identified as one or two. For instance, in a *Tablā*, one can find two notes only, Sa and Ri. Notwithstanding, the intermediary sound is unmanifested in the relative effect of the linguistic sound.

It needs a clearance that, here, musical sound and music is being synonymously used. These terms refer to instrumental music and the *ālāpa* mode of Indian classical; *ergo*, any intervention of percussion instruments and lyrical compositions is restricted. For additional information, music combined with percussion/s merges subtle and intermediary gross sound. Likewise, other combinations should be understood.

Before elaborating on the PS of music, it is important to define 'power' from the Indic aspect.

Definition of power

Though it is mentioned that for a fluent understanding for the readers, apt English equivalents of most the Sanskrit terms will be used in this paper, it is mandatory to mention the Sanskrit of 'power', i.e., '*śakti*' to define it. Otherwise, a critical analysis is challenging to do. Etymologically, '*śakti*' is constructed with the verbal root '*śak*' with an affix '*ktin*'. This affix does not change the meaning of a verbal root by changing that into a noun. Therefore, the sense of the verbal root '*śak*' is equal to the meaning of the noun '*śakti*'. It means 'to be able,' 'to have the power to effect'.

Inference of power is always gained from an effect. Fire burns. The impact of burning makes us infer the power of fire. So

says Abhinavagupta, “Power is the inference of a cognizer of the nature of any existent entity [ii].” It also directly suggests a law that the power of an existent entity exists in that naturally. Jayaratha (ca. 1300 AD.), a famous commentator of TA, put an erudite comment on this matter which makes some vital points, such as there could be different effects of an existent entity, but those effects do not mean that there are other entities. However, those show the true nature of that existing entity only, *ergo*, one cannot differentiate an existing entity from its powers, e.g., fire also has the power of cooking and others. Furthermore, those differences are inferences of cognizers [iii]. In *Pañcadaśī*, Vidyāraṇya (ca. 1374-1380 AD.) also makes the same opinion that power is to be inferred by the effect and nobody can perceive the power of an existent entity before the effect [iv].

This discussion also backs the comments of modern scholars regarding the powers of music as they explain various powers in their literature by observing the effects of music in different therapeutic atmospheres (Bufalini & George, 2020; Sacks, 2006).

Power of sweetness

Music that is not separated by letters is full of PS. Expressing letters through sentences in articulated linguistic sounds has a coarseness due to friction between internal air and vocal cords. This idea will be more transparent with some practical examples. When one says, for instance, “I am going”, – this sentence has many folds of sounds viz., [a], [I], [ə], [m], [g], [əʊ] and [ŋ]. On the other hand, such folds do not exist in musical sounds. They form various melodies with their consonances and harmonies and blend into oneness. For instance, if one plays a phrase of *rāga Durgā*, Sa Ri Ma- Ri Sa Dha- Sa, all notes mingle into one experience. It may be called a musical sentence. So is with ‘Für Elise’ and others. A cognizer could infer the sweetness of music, but Abhinavagupta defined and theorized the logic behind that and identified it as the PS of the music, i.e., non-separateness and mingling into oneness is sweetness. Abhinavagupta also mentions that because of this PB, keen listeners indulge themselves in music and find themselves identical to it. This statement further connects with the power of bliss and the relish of *rasa*. This connection will be discussed in an upcoming section.

Furthermore, the Sanskrit word for sweetness, ‘*mādhurya*’, also connects with the word ‘*madhu*’, lit., honey. The ‘*madhu*’ with an affix ‘*ṣyañ*’ becomes ‘*mādhurya*’, which says the characteristic of ‘*madhu*’. In general, the sweet and pleasurable feature is understood by the word ‘*mādhurya*’ in Sanskrit. Notably, falling water and even oil too may have splitting textures. However, that does not happen with honey. It falls, creating a smooth texture. Such characteristic adjunct is used to suggest the non-separateness of music and that further theorized the PS.

Power of bliss

Music’s other and most crucial power is the power of bliss (PB). Abhinavagupta states, “When one is lost in a state of ecstasy by listening to music or by anointing and smooth touch of sandal paste etc., intermediary obstacles elope and a vibration arises in the heart called as PB, and such a person is called an aesthete (Skt.: *sahṛdaya*, lit. one who is attuned with heart) [v].”

It is a general experience of listeners that listening to good music overwhelms them, and they feel that vibration in their hearts or the middle of their chests, which is undoubtedly delightful. The PB is the cause of that delight and vibration. People who ever feel that is an aesthete. Is it possible that the same piece of music is not delightful for one but pleases another? Sure. Personality, social and behavioural factors depend on receiving delight from a particular artistic presentation (Gangopadhyay et al., 2022). For instance, *Bāul* (Bengali: ■■■■) music is not favourable to A, and it only admires classical music.

On the other hand, B likes both. It is also possible that C wants only *Bāul*. It does not mean that *Bāul* or classical or another genre of music is not enjoyable. It is because of one's personality, which consists of social, behavioural and other parameters.

This delight comes to an aesthete because PB exists in music. This effect could be explained with the help of RT, *āśā* itself is bliss or happiness. Moreover, the mentioning of 'aesthete' in the context of PB by Abhinavagupta makes this topic more vibrant that without revealing the general idea of *rasa*, the concept of PB could not be clear as bliss is further related to the *sattva* entity, which is the answer to the productive application of music as a therapeutic agent.

Psycho-cognition of *rasa* and *music*

The mental process leading to the relish of *arasa* is termed here as psycho-cognition. In the doctrine of the RT, the psycho-cognitive aspect is one of the other aspects, viz., philosophical and metaphysical aspects. In this present article, the psycho-cognitive approach is the contextual one. Before explaining briefly, it must be noted that '*rasa*' is a technical term that could not be translated into English and is backed by several scholars (Dace, 1963; Gnoli, 1985; Ingalls et al., 1990; Raghavan, 1940). Though scholars tried to translate this term variously at the earlier stage of translations (Ballantyne, 1851; Ghosh, 1951), it did not work out and preferred to be used as it is.

Traditionally, psycho-cognition of *rasa* is expressed by a maxim, mentioning that will be helpful to understand the further critical discussion. The maxim is called *pānakarasanyāya*, i.e., the maxim of sherbet or mocktail. A mocktail is made of various ingredients which are not separately enjoyed in the process of consumption of a mocktail, but "we relish a fantastic mocktail." So is *rasa*. It is not an independent variable but a dependent. *Arasa* depends on three essential components: determinant factors (DF), consequent components (CC) and transitory emotions (TE). These are revealed in the aphorism of *rasa* in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* (NS), ascribed to Bharata Muni. Bharata theorized *rasa* in his aphorism thus: "the *rasa* is produced from a combination of determinants, consequents and transitory emotions [vi]." DF is twofold, CC is threefold, and TEs are 33 in number.

In a scene that could be of drama, story, film or others, the characters are the foundational DFs (${}^{\text{F}}\text{DF}$) because artists express emotions through art by holding them only. Plots and created atmosphere are stimulant DFs (${}^{\text{S}}\text{DF}$) as they boost those emotions toward a desirable *rasa*. Characters' dialogues (${}^{\text{W}}\text{CC}$), their gestures (${}^{\text{G}}\text{CC}$), and their expressed psychophysical emotions (${}^{\text{PE}}\text{CC}$) (e.g., tear, thrilling, shivering and others, a total of eight in number) are CCs. These all are used to be presented according to the desirable *rasa*. TEs are like gap-fillers. They come and go but do not sustain

more. They also come in accord with the desirable *rasa*, an intervention of a foreign TE could destroy the appearance of the desirable *rasa*. Therefore, a relish of *rasa* is always a psychological blend of all these three *rasa* components, i.e., DCT (DF+CC+TE).

In the context of music, an abstract art form, a different explanation of DCT occurs (Gangopadhyay et al., 2022). Here, instruments become the ^FDF. ^SDF is interpreted as the atmosphere where a listener relishes a music rendition that could be favourable according to the desirable *rasa*. Because of the absence of linguistic sound, dialogues consisting of words are replaced by musical notes (*svaras*). So ^WCC becomes ^SCC. ^GCC is identified as notes' rendering style and movement according to desirable phrases for desirable *rasa*. ^{PE}CC and TEs could not be found directly from musical rendition but can be logically derived from the listeners to understand the relished *rasa* (Gangopadhyay et al., 2022).

Sattva is key to the therapeutic use

The relish of any *rasa* happens because of the existence of *sattva*. In other words, one individual relished that *rasa* means *sattva* was evoked. This evocative factor of *sattva*, which is further related to PB, justifies music's therapeutic impact on the psyche with the psychological aspects of Ayurveda. It also explains the agreement of significant authors of Ayurvedic compendiums concerning the use of music in some general and critical therapeutic contexts (Gangopadhyay & Prasad, 2022a).

Sattva is the state of the psyche untouched by *rajas* and *tamas*. This fact is not limited to the Ayurvedic doctrine but is accepted by the critics of aesthetics too. This statement also reveals that by relishing *rasa*, one can enhance *sattva*. Moreover, *sattva* is the natural state of mind, whether *rajas* and *tamas*, in their aggravated state, are the root causes of psychological distresses. Of course, in a non-aggravated state, *rajas* and *tamas* are not harmful as they are always present in all beings; otherwise, any action (related to positive *rajas*), sleeping (related to positive *tamas*) and other activities could not happen.

Bliss = relish of *rasa* = evoke of *sattva*

Abhinavagupta defines an aesthete who relishes *rasa* in this way in his *Locana* commentary on Ānandavardhana's (ca. 9th century AD.) *Dhvanyāloka*, "The word *sahr̥daya* (lit. "having their hearts with it") denotes persons who are capable of identifying with the subject matter, as the mirror of their hearts has been polished by the constant study and practice of poetry, and who respond to it sympathetically in their own hearts [vii] (Ingalls et al., 1990, p.70)."

A critical observation of the above definition and Abhinavagupta's statement on PB will justify the mutual relations between bliss, *sattva* and *rasa*. In the above definition, there are three vital points:

- a. Identifying with the subject matter
- b. Polished hearts
- c. Sympathetical response in hearts

The second point, which says that aesthetes relish *rasa* as they have polished hearts, suggests the *sattva* state of mind because predominant *rajas* and *tamas* blur the psyche. The third point has a connection with the statement of Abhinavagupta on PB. He says that the feeling of vibration in the hearts of aesthetes comes because of PB. It further means that the Vibro-phenomenon indicates the blissful state of aesthetes. Therefore, aesthetes in a *sattva*-predominant state of mind are also blissful conditionally.

The first point has a link with PS and also with PB. By identifying with the subject matter, relate the statement regarding PS directly and further connect with the explanation of PB, where Abhinavagupta mentions that after the dissolution of intermediary obstacles, aesthetes relish the bliss. Therefore, PS, with non-separateness and oneness, dissolves the intermediary barriers, and PB situates aesthetes in bliss.

The blissful aspect of *rasa* further shows that music that does not make one blissful or delighted is not eligible for *rasa* manifestation (depending subjectively or objectively). However, such a rendition could be recognized as a work of art. Likewise, whether a music rendition is relishable or not is also relative. Individuals could relish *rasa* from the same composition, which others could not (Gangopadhyay et al., 2022). Moreover, it is also possible that a musical rendition could not make listeners blissful, which could mean that the PB is not potentially expressed in that rendition. There is the burning power of fire, but one must be knowledgeable about its use.

Conclusion

The psychological aspect of *rasa* logically shapes the understanding of the two powers of music, theorized by Ācārya Abhinavagupta. It is identified that two powers, sweetness and bliss, are interconnected, and both are further connected with the *rasa*. The power of sweetness helps to vanish any intermediary hindrance and make aesthetes identify themselves with music, and the power of bliss then comes into action and situates them in a blissful state. No need to say that feeling bliss and relishing *rasa* are the same. This relish of *rasa* again clears that such relish itself means the evocative state of *sattva* in the psyche of that individual who is relishing *rasa*. Hence, target music is, by default, pleasant, pleasurable, calm and blissful; this is also desirable to modern scholars who evidently suggest that pleasant and peaceful music is only helpful in therapy, not the coercive type of music (Hallam, 2010; Sacks, 2006). The kind of music in this discussion is non-percussive. Hence a critical debate from a rhythmic aspect has not happened in this article, so the modern element of motor power (Sacks, 2006) could not become a part of the analysis from an Indic aspect which is a limitation and matter of future recommendation. However, Sacks's (2006) suggestion of evocative power is included by mentioning the PB and the theory of relish of *rasa*. Mention of the stirring or animating power (Sacks, 2006) also comes under the *rasa* aspect. Because in the TEs, nostalgia and other related emotions appear and are observed the same in practical studies (Gangopadhyay et al., 2022). However, this animating power could be more visible in lyrical music, which needs further investigation.

The *sattva* aspect connects music from an Indic aspect of therapy and shows the Ayurvedic acceptance of the music genre for therapeutic use. Notably, all mentioned occurrences – disappearing intermediary obstacles, identifying with the

music, feeling bliss, relish of *rasa*, the evocation of *sattva* and subduction of *rajas* and *tamas* – do not happen in seriatim. If one has occurred, others should have their presence by default. Every occurrence is the critical nuance of another.

Glossaries

Sanskrit terms used in English and their abbreviations (if applicable)

1. Power of sweetness = *mādhurya-śakti* = PS
2. Power of bliss = *ānanda-śakti* = PB
3. Non-separateness and oneness = *avibhāgaikarūpatva* (TA²⁰⁰², 3.238_{cd})
4. Identical with a subject / identifying with the subject matter = *tanmayībhūti* (TA²⁰⁰², 3.240_{ab}) / *tanmayībhavana* (Locana on DA¹⁹⁸³, 1.1, p. 13)
5. Musical sound = subtle gross sound = pure music = *sthūla-paśyanti*
6. Linguistic sound = grossest sound = *sthūla-vaikharī*
7. Percussive sound = gross intermediary sound = *sthūla-madhyamā*
8. Letter = *varṇa* [e.g., a-b-c-d / a-ā-i-ī...ka-kha etc.]
9. Existent entity = *bhāva-padārtha*
10. Effect = *phala/kārya*
11. Coarseness = *pāruṣī*
12. Aphorism of *rasa* = *rasa-sūtra*
13. Determinant Factor = *vibhāva* = DF
 1. a. Foundational DF = *ā lambana vibhāva* = ^FDF
 2. b. Stimulant DF = *uddīpana vibhāva* = ^SDF
14. Consequent Component = *anubhāva* = CC
 1. Word as CC = ^WCC || Musical notes (*śvaras*) as CC [in music] = ^SCC
 2. Gesture as CC = ^GCC
 3. Psychophysical emotions as CC = ^{PE}CC
15. Transitory Emotions = *vyabhicāribhāva/sañcāribhāva* = TE
16. Note = *svara* [e.g., Sa Ri Ga Ma etc.]

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- i. *avibhāgaikarūpatvaṃ mādhuryaṃ śaktirucyate// sthānavāyavādigharṣotthā sphuṭataiva ca pāruṣī/ tadasyāṃ nādarūpāyāṃ saṃvitsavidhavarṭtitaḥ// sājātyāt tanmayībhūtirhagityevopalabhyate/* (TA²⁰⁰², 3.238_{cd}-240_{ab})

- ii. *śaktiśca nāma bhāvasya svaṃ rūpaṃ mātṛkalpitam* (TA²⁰⁰², 1.68_{ab})
- iii. *yasya kasyacana sataḥ padārthasya svam eva rūpaṃ phalabhedāt bhedāropeṇa śaktiḥ iti pramāṭṛbhiḥ prikalpyate, na tu asau vastutaḥ padārthāntaraṃ kiñcit* (Jayaratha's comment on TA²⁰⁰², 1.68_{ab}, p. 92)
- iv. *nistattvā kāryagamyā'sya śaktirmāyāgnisaktivat/ na hi śaktiḥ kvacit kaiścid buddhyate kāryataḥ purā* (PD²⁰¹¹, 2.47)
- v. *tathā hi madhure gīte sparśe vā candanādike// mādhyasthyavigame yāsau hṛdaye spandamānatā/ ānandaśaktiḥ saivoktā yataḥ sahrdayo janaḥ* (TA²⁰⁰², 3.209_{cd}-210)
- vi. *vibhāvānubhāvavyabhicārisaṃyogād rasaniṣpattiḥ* (NS¹⁹⁵⁶, Chap. 6, p. 272)
- vii. *yeṣāṃ kāvyānuśīlanābhyāsavaśād viśadībhūte manomukure varṇanīyatanmayibhavanayogyatā te svahrdayasaṃvādabhājaḥ sahrdayāḥ* (Locana on DA¹⁹⁸³, 1.1, p. 13)

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- **NS¹⁹⁵⁶** = Bharata & Abhinavagupta. (1956). *Nāṭyaśāstram abhinavabhāratīsametaḥ* [Nāṭyaśāstra of Bharatamuni with the commentary Abhinavabhāratī by Abhinavaguptācārya] (M. R. Kavi & K. S. R. Sastri, Eds.; 2nd ed., Vol. 1) [Gaekwad's Oriental Series (No. XXXVI)]. Oriental Institute.
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